Para-Bhakti or Supreme Devotion

Para-Bhakti or Supreme Devotion

Swami Vivekananda

Publisher: Swami Vivekananda Quotes

Quick navigation

Table of Contents

Chapters

Book details

Author: Swami Vivekananda
Source: Wikisource

E-book creator and publisher: Swami Vivekananda Quotes
Ebook published: 2 March 2014

Chapter I
The Preparatory Renunciation

We have now finished the consideration of what may be called the preparatory Bhakti, and are entering on the study of the Parâ-Bhakti or supreme devotion. We have to speak of a preparation to the practice of this Para-Bhakti. All such preparations are intended only for the purification of the soul. The repetition of names, the rituals, the forms, and the symbols, all these various things are for the purification of the soul. The greatest purifier among all such things, a purifier without which no one can enter the regions of this higher devotion (Para-Bhakti), is renunciation. This frightens many; yet, without it, there cannot be any spiritual growth. In all our Yogas this renunciation is necessary. This is the stepping-stone and the real centre and the real heart of all spiritual culture — renunciation. This is religion — renunciation.

When the human soul draws back from the things of the world and tries to go into deeper things; when man, the spirit which has here somehow become concretised and materialised, understands that he is thereby going to be destroyed and to be reduced almost into mere matter, and turns his face away from matter — then begins renunciation, then begins real spiritual growth. The Karma-Yogi's renunciation is in the shape of giving up all the fruits of his action; he is not attached to the results of his labour; he does not care for any reward here or hereafter. The Râja-Yogi knows that the whole of nature is intended for the soul to acquire experience, and that the result of all the experiences of the soul is for it to become aware of its eternal separateness from nature. The human soul has to understand and realise that it has been spirit, and not matter, through eternity, and that this conjunction of it with matter is and can be only for a time. The Raja-Yogi learns the lesson of renunciation through his own experience of nature. The Jnâna-Yogi has the harshest of all renunciations to go through, as he has to realise from the very first that the whole of this solid-looking nature is all an illusion. He has to understand that all that is any kind of manifestation of power in nature belongs to the soul, and not to nature. He has to know from the very start that all knowledge and all experience are in the soul and not in nature; so he has at once and by the sheer force of rational conviction to tear himself away from all bondage to nature. He lets nature and all that belongs to her go, he lets them vanish and tries to stand alone!

Of all renunciations, the most natural, so to say, is that of the Bhakti-Yogi. Here there is no violence, nothing to give up, nothing to tear off, as it were, from ourselves, nothing from which we have violently to separate ourselves. The Bhakta's renunciation is easy, smooth flowing, and as natural as the things around us. We see the manifestation of this sort of renunciation, although more or less in the form of caricatures, every day around us. A man begins to love a woman; after a while he loves another, and the first woman he lets go. She drops put of his mind smoothly, gently, without his feeling the want of her at all. A woman loves a man; she then begins to love another man, and the first one drops off from her mind quite naturally. A man loves his own city, then he begins to love his country, and the intense love for his little city drops

off smoothly, naturally. Again, a man learns to love the whole world; his love for his country, his intense, fanatical patriotism drops off without hurting him, without any manifestation of violence. An uncultured man loves the pleasures of the senses intensely; as he becomes cultured, he begins to love intellectual pleasures, and his sense-enjoyments become less and less. No man can enjoy a meal with the same gusto or pleasure as a dog or a wolf, but those pleasures which a man gets from intellectual experiences and achievements, the dog can never enjoy. At first, pleasure is in association with the lowest senses; but as soon as an animal reaches a higher plane of existence, the lower kind of pleasures becomes less intense. In human society, the nearer the man is to the animal, the stronger is his pleasure in the senses; and the higher and the more cultured the man is, the greater is his pleasure in intellectual and such other finer pursuits. So when a man gets even higher than the plane of the intellect, higher than that of mere thought, when he gets to the plane of spirituality and of divine inspiration, he finds there a state of bliss, compared with which all the pleasures of the senses, or even of the intellect, are as nothing. When the moon shines brightly, all the stars become dim; and when the sun shines, the moon herself becomes dim. The renunciation necessary for the attainment of Bhakti is not obtained by killing anything, but just comes in as naturally as in the presence of an increasingly stronger light, the less intense ones become dimmer and dimmer until they vanish away completely. So this love of the pleasures of the senses and of the intellect is all made dim and thrown aside and cast into the shade by the love of God Himself.

That love of God grows and assumes a form which is called Para-Bhakti or supreme devotion. Forms vanish, rituals fly away, books are superseded; images, temples, churches, religions and sects, countries and nationalities — all these little limitations and bondages fall off by their own nature from him who knows this love of God. Nothing remains to bind him or fetter his freedom. A ship, all of a sudden, comes near a magnetic rock, and its iron bolts and bars are all attracted and drawn out, and the planks get loosened and freely float on the water. Divine grace thus loosens the binding bolts and bars of the soul, and it becomes free. So in this renunciation auxiliary to devotion, there is no harshness, no dryness no struggle, nor repression nor suppression. The Bhakta has not to suppress any single one of his emotions, he only strives to intensify them and direct them to God.

Chapter II
The Bhakta's Renunciation Results from Love

We see love everywhere in nature. Whatever in society is good and great and sublime is the working out of that love; whatever in society is very bad, nay diabolical, is also the ill-directed working out of the same emotion of love. It is this same emotion that gives us the pure and holy conjugal love between husband and wife as well as the sort of love which goes to satisfy the lowest forms of animal passion. The emotion is the same, but its manifestation is different in different cases. It is the same feeling of love, well or ill directed, that impels one man to do good and to give all he has to the poor, while it makes another man cut the throats of his brethren and take away all their possessions. The former loves others as much as the latter loves himself. The direction of the love is bad in the case of the latter, but it is right and proper in the other case. The same fire that cooks a meal for us may burn a child, and it is no fault of the fire if it does so; the difference lies in the way in which it is used. Therefore love, the intense longing for association, the strong desire on the part of two to become one — and it may be, after all, of all to become merged in one — is being manifested everywhere in higher or lower forms as the case may be.

Bhakti-Yoga is the science of higher love. It shows us how to direct it; it shows us how to control it, how to manage it, how to use it, how to give it a new aim, as it were, and from it obtain the highest and most glorious results, that is, how to make it lead us to spiritual blessedness. Bhakti-Yoga does not say, "Give up"; it only says, "Love; love the Highest !" — and everything low naturally falls off from him, the object of whose love is the Highest.

"I cannot tell anything about Thee except that Thou art my love. Thou art beautiful, Oh, Thou art beautiful! Thou art beauty itself." What is after all really required of us in this Yoga is that our thirst after the beautiful should be directed to God. What is the beauty in the human face, in the sky, in the stars, and in the moon? It is only the partial apprehension of the real all-embracing Divine Beauty. "He shining, everything shines. It is through His light that all things shine." Take this high position of Bhakti which makes you forget at once all your little personalities. Take yourself away from all the world's little selfish clingings. Do not look upon humanity as the centre of all your human and higher interests. Stand as a witness, as a student, and observe the phenomena of nature. Have the feeling of personal non-attachment with regard to man, and see how this mighty feeling of love is working itself out in the world. Sometimes a little friction is produced, but that is only in the course of the struggle to attain the higher real love. Sometimes there is a little fight or a little fall; but it is all only by the way. Stand aside, and freely let these frictions come. You feel the frictions only when you are in the current of the world, but when you are outside of it simply as a witness and as a student, you will be able to see that there are millions and millions of channels in which God is manifesting Himself as Love.

"Wherever there is any bliss, even though in the most sensual of things, there is a spark of that

Eternal Bliss which is the Lord Himself." Even in the lowest kinds of attraction there is the germ of divine love. One of the names of the Lord in Sanskrit is Hari, and this means that He attracts all things to Himself. His is in fact the only attraction worthy of human hearts. Who can attract a soul really? Only He! Do you think dead matter can truly attract the soul? It never did, and never will. When you see a man going after a beautiful face, do you think that it is the handful of arranged material molecules which really attracts the man? Not at all. Behind those material particles there must be and is the play of divine influence and divine love. The ignorant man does not know it, but yet, consciously or unconsciously, he is attracted by it and it alone. So even the lowest forms of attraction derive their power from God Himself. "None, O beloved, ever loved the husband for the husband's sake; it is the Âtman, the Lord who is within, for whose sake the husband is loved." Loving wives may know this or they may not; it is true all the same. "None, O beloved, ever loved the wife for the wife's sake, but it is the Self in the wife that is loved." Similarly, no one loves a child or anything else in the world except on account of Him who is within. The Lord is the great magnet, and we are all like iron filings; we are being constantly attracted by Him, and all of us are struggling to reach Him. All this struggling of ours in this world is surely not intended for selfish ends. Fools do not know what they are doing: the work of their life is, after all, to approach the great magnet. All the tremendous struggling and fighting in life is intended to make us go to Him ultimately and be one with Him.

The Bhakti-Yogi, however, knows the meaning of life's struggles; he understands it. He has passed through a long series of these struggles and knows what they mean and earnestly desires to be free from the friction thereof; he wants to avoid the clash and go direct to the centre of all attraction, the great Hari This is the renunciation of the Bhakta. This mighty attraction in the direction of God makes all other attractions vanish for him. This mighty infinite love of God which enters his heart leaves no place for any other love to live there. How can it be otherwise" Bhakti fills his heart with the divine waters of the ocean of love, which is God Himself; there is no place there for little loves. That is to say, the Bhakta's renunciation is that Vairâgya or non-attachment for all things that are not God which results from Anurâga or great attachment to God.

This is the ideal preparation for the attainment of the supreme Bhakti. When this renunciation comes, the gate opens for the soul to pass through and reach the lofty regions of supreme devotion or Para-Bhakti. Then it is that we begin to understand what Para-Bhakti is; and the man who has entered into the inner shrine of the Para-Bhakti alone has the right to say that all forms and symbols are useless to him as aids to religious realisation. He alone has attained that supreme state of love commonly called the brotherhood of man; the rest only talk. He sees no distinctions; the mighty ocean of love has entered into him, and he sees not man in man, but beholds his Beloved everywhere. Through every face shines to him his Hari. The light in the sun or the moon is all His manifestation. Wherever there is beauty or sublimity, to him it is all His. Such Bhaktas are still living; the world is never without them. Such, though bitten by a serpent, only say that a messenger came to them from their Beloved. Such men alone have the right to talk of universal brotherhood. They feel no resentment; their minds never react in the form of

hatred or jealousy. The external, the sensuous, has vanished from them for ever. How can they be angry, when, through their love, they are always able to see the Reality behind the scenes?

Chapter III
The Naturalness of Bhakti-Yoga and its Central Secret

"Those who with constant attention always worship You, and those who worship the Undifferentiated, the Absolute, of these who are the greatest Yogis?" — Arjuna asked of Shri Krishna. The answer was: "Those who concentrating their minds on Me worship Me with eternal constancy and are endowed with the highest faith, they are My best worshippers, they are the greatest Yogis. Those that worship the Absolute, the Indescribable, the Undifferentiated, the Omnipresent, the Unthinkable, the All-comprehending, the Immovable, and the Eternal, by controlling the play of their organs and having the conviction of sameness in regard to all things, they also, being engaged in doing good to all beings, come to Me alone. But to those whose minds have been devoted to the unmanifested Absolute, the difficulty of the struggle along the way is much greater, for it is indeed with great difficulty that the path of the unmanifested Absolute is trodden by any embodied being. Those who, having offered up all their work unto Me, with entire reliance on Me, meditate on Me and worship Me without any attachment to anything else — them, I soon lift up from the ocean of ever-recurring births and deaths, as their mind is wholly attached to Me" (Gita, XII).

Jnâna-Yoga and Bhakti-Yoga are both referred to here. Both may be said to have been defined in the above passage. Jnana-Yoga is grand; it is high philosophy; and almost every human being thinks, curiously enough, that he can surely do everything required of him by philosophy; but it is really very difficult to live truly the life of philosophy. We are often apt to run into great dangers in trying to guide our life by philosophy. This world may be said to be divided between persons of demoniacal nature who think the care-taking of the body to be the be-all and the end-all of existence, and persons of godly nature who realise that the body is simply a means to an end, an instrument intended for the culture of the soul. The devil can and indeed does cite the scriptures for his own purpose; and thus the way of knowledge appears to offer justification to what the bad man does, as much as it offers inducements to what the good man does. This is the great danger in Jnana-Yoga. But Bhakti-Yoga is natural, sweet, and gentle; the Bhakta does not take such high flights as the Jnana-Yogi, and, therefore, he is not apt to have such big falls. Until the bandages of the soul pass away, it cannot of course be free, whatever may be the nature of the path that the religious man takes.

Here is a passage showing how, in the case of one of the blessed Gopis, the soul-binding chains of both merit and demerit were broken. "The intense pleasure in meditating on God took away the binding effects of her good deeds. Then her intense misery of soul in not attaining unto Him washed off all her sinful propensities; and then she became free." —

तच्चिन्ताविपुलाह्लादक्षीणपुण्यचया तथा। तदप्राप्ति महद्दुःखविलीनाशेषपातका॥ निरुच्छ्वासतया मुक्तिं गतान्या गोपकन्यका॥

(*Vishnu-Purâna*). In Bhakti-Yoga the central secret is, therefore, to know that the various

passions and feelings and emotions in the human heart are not wrong in themselves; only they have to be carefully controlled and given a higher and higher direction, until they attain the very highest condition of excellence. The highest direction is that which takes us to God; every other direction is lower. We find that pleasures and pains are very common and oft-recurring feelings in our lives. When a man feels pain because he has not wealth or some such worldly thing, he is giving a wrong direction to the feeling. Still pain has its uses. Let a man feel pain that he has not reached the Highest, that he has not reached God, and that pain will be to his salvation When you become glad that you have a handful of coins, it is a wrong direction given to the faculty of joy; it should be given a higher direction, it must be made to serve the Highest Ideal. Pleasure in that kind of ideal must surely be our highest joy. This same thing is true of all our other feelings. The Bhakta says that not one of them is wrong, he gets hold of them all and points them unfailingly towards God.

Chapter IV
The Forms of Love — Manifestation

Here are some of the forms in which love manifests itself. First there is reverence. Why do people show reverence to temples and holy places? Because He is worshipped there, and His presence is associated with all such places. Why do people in every country pay reverence to teachers of religion? It is natural for the human heart to do so, because all such teachers preach the Lord. At bottom, reverence is a growth out of love; we can none of us revere him whom we do not love. Then comes Priti — pleasure in God. What an immense pleasure men take in the objects of the senses. They go anywhere, run through any danger, to get the thing which they love, the thing which their senses like. What is wanted of the Bhakta is this very kind of intense love which has, however, to be directed to God. Then there is the sweetest of pains, Viraha, the intense misery due to the absence of the beloved. When a man feels intense misery because he has not attained to God, has not known that which is the only thing worthy to be known, and becomes in consequence very dissatisfied and almost mad — then there is Viraha; and this state of the mind makes him feel disturbed in the presence of anything other than the beloved (Ekarativichikitsâ). In earthly love we see how often this Viraha comes. Again, when men are really and intensely in love with women or women with men, they feel a kind of natural annoyance in the presence of all those whom they do not love. Exactly the same state of impatience in regard to things that are not loved comes to the mind when Para-Bhakti holds sway over it; even to talk about things other than God becomes distasteful then. "Think of Him, think of Him alone, and give up all other vain words" अन्या वाचो विमुंचथ। – Those who talk of Him alone, the Bhakta finds to be friendly to him; while those who talk of anything else appear to him to be unfriendly. A still higher stage of love is reached when life itself is maintained for the sake of the one Ideal of Love, when life itself is considered beautiful and worth living only on account of that Love (तदर्थप्राणसंस्थानं) . Without it, such a life would not remain even for a moment. Life is sweet, because it thinks of the Beloved. Tadiyatâ (*His-ness*) comes when a man becomes perfect according to Bhakti — when he has become blessed, when he has attained God, when he has touched the feet of God, as it were. Then his whole nature is purified and completely changed. All his purpose in life then becomes fulfilled. Yet many such Bhaktas live on just to worship Him. That is the bliss, the only pleasure in life which they will not give up. "O king, such is the blessed quality of Hari that even those who have become satisfied with everything, all the knots of whose hearts have been cut asunder, even they love the Lord for love's sake" — the Lord "Whom all the gods worship — all the lovers of liberation, and all the knowers of the Brahman" — यं सर्वे देवा नमन्ति मुमुक्षवो ब्रह्मवादिनश्चेति (*Nri. Tap. Up.*). Such is the power of love. When a man has forgotten himself altogether, and does not feel that anything belongs to him, then he acquires the state of Tadiyata; everything is sacred to him, because it belongs to the Beloved. Even in regard to earthly love, the lover thinks that everything belonging to his beloved is sacred and so dear to him. He loves even a piece of cloth belonging to the darling of his heart

In the same way, when a person loves the Lord, the whole universe becomes dear to him, because it is all His.

Chapter V
Universal Love and How it Leads to Self Surrender

How can we love the Vyashti, the particular, without first loving the Samashti, the universal? God is the Samashti, the generalised and the abstract universal whole; and the universe that we see is the Vyashti, the particularised thing. To love the whole universe is possible only by way of loving the Samashti — the universal — which is, as it were, the one unity in which are to be found millions and millions of smaller unities. The philosophers of India do not stop at the particulars; they cast a hurried glance at the particulars and immediately start to find the generalised forms which will include all the particulars. The search after the universal is the one search of Indian philosophy and religion. The Jnâni aims at the wholeness of things, at that one absolute and; generalised Being, knowing which he knows everything. The Bhakta wishes to realise that one generalised abstract Person, in loving whom he loves the whole universe. The Yogi wishes to have possession of that one generalised form of power, by controlling which he controls this whole universe. The Indian mind, throughout its history, has been directed to this kind of singular search after the universal in everything — in science, in psychology, in love, in philosophy. So the conclusion to which the Bhakta comes is that, if you go on merely loving one, person after another, you may go on loving them so for an infinite length of time, without being in the least able to love the world as a whole. When, at last, the central idea is, however, arrived at that the sum total of all love is God, that the sum total of the aspirations of all the souls in the universe, whether they be free, or bound, or struggling towards liberation, is God, then alone it becomes possible for any one to put forth universal love. God is the Samashti, and this visible universe is God differentiated and made manifest. If we love this sum total, we love everything. Loving the world doing it good will all come easily then; we have to obtain this power only by loving God first; otherwise it is no joke to do good to the world. "Everything is His and He is my Lover; I love Him," says the Bhakta. In this way everything becomes sacred to the Bhakta, because all things are His. All are His children, His body, His manifestation. How then may we hurt any one? How then may we not love any one? With the love of God will come, as a sure effect, the love of every one in the universe. The nearer we approach God, the more do we begin to see that all things are in Him. When the soul succeeds in appropriating the bliss of this supreme love, it also begins to see Him in everything. Our heart will thus become an eternal fountain of love. And when we reach even higher states of this love, all the little differences between the things of the world are entirely lost; man is seen no more as man, but only as God; the animal is seen no more as animal, but as God; even the tiger is no more a tiger, but a manifestation of God. Thus in this intense state of Bhakti, worship is offered to every one, to every life, and to every being.

एवं सर्वेषु भूतेषु भक्तिरव्यभिचारिणी। कर्तव्या पण्डितैर्ज्ञात्वा सर्वभूतमयं हरिम्॥

— "Knowing that Hari, the Lord, is in every being, the wise have thus to manifest unswerving love towards all beings."

As a result of this kind of intense all-absorbing love, comes the feeling of perfect self-surrender, the conviction that nothing that happens is against us, Aprâtikulya. Then the loving soul is able to say, if pain comes, "Welcome pain." If misery comes, it will say, "Welcome misery, you are also from the Beloved." If a serpent comes, it will say, "Welcome serpent." If death comes, such a Bhakta will welcome it with a smile. "Blessed am I that they all come to me; they are all welcome." The Bhakta in this state of perfect resignation, arising out of intense love to God and to all that are His, ceases to distinguish between pleasure and pain in so far as they affect him. He does not know what it is to complain of pain or misery; and this kind of uncomplaining resignation to the will of God, who is all love, is indeed a worthier acquisition than all the glory of grand and heroic performances.

To the vast majority of mankind, the body is everything; the body is all the universe to them; bodily enjoyment is their all in all. This demon of the worship of the body and of the things of the body has entered into us all. We may indulge in tall talk and take very high flights, but we are like vultures all the same; our mind is directed to the piece of carrion down below. Why should our body be saved, say, from the tiger? Why may we not give it over to the tiger? The tiger will thereby be pleased, and that is not altogether so very far from self-sacrifice and worship. Can you reach the realization of such an idea in which all sense of self is completely lost? It is a very dizzy height on the pinnacle of the religion of love, and few in this world have ever climbed up to it; but until a man reaches that highest point of ever-ready and ever-willing self-sacrifice, he cannot become a perfect Bhakta. We may all manage to maintain our bodies more or less satisfactorily and for longer or shorter intervals of time. Nevertheless, our bodies have to go; there is no permanence about them. Blessed are they whose bodies get destroyed in the service of others. "Wealth, and even life itself, the sage always holds ready for the service of others. In this world, there being one thing certain, viz death, it is far better that this body dies in a good cause than in a bad one." We may drag our life on for fifty years or a hundred years; but after that, what is it that happens? Everything that is the result of combination must get dissolved and die. There must and will come a time for it to be decomposed. Jesus and Buddha and Mohammed are all dead; all the great Prophets and Teachers of the world are dead.

"In this evanescent world, where everything is falling to pieces, we have to make the highest use of what time we have," says the Bhakta; and really the highest use of life is to hold it at the service of all beings. It is the horrible body-idea that breeds all the selfishness in the world, just this one delusion that we are wholly the body we own, and that we must by all possible means try our very best to preserve and to please it. If you know that you are positively other than your body, you have then none to fight with or struggle against; you are dead to all ideas of selfishness. So the Bhakta declares that we have to hold ourselves as if we are altogether dead to all the things of the world; and that is indeed self-surrender. Let things come as they may. This is the meaning of "Thy will be done" — not going about fighting and struggling and thinking all the while that God wills all our own weaknesses and worldly ambitions. It may be that good comes even out of our selfish struggles; that is, however, God's look-out. The perfected Bhakta's idea must be never to will and work for himself. "Lord, they build high temples in Your name;

they make large gifts in Your name; I am poor; I have nothing; so I take this body of mine and place it at Your feet. Do not give me up, O Lord." Such is the prayer proceeding out of the depths of the Bhakta's heart. To him who has experienced it, this eternal sacrifice of the self unto the Beloved Lord is higher by far than all wealth and power, than even all soaring thoughts of renown and enjoyment. The peace of the Bhakta's calm resignation is a peace that passeth all understanding and is of incomparable value. His Apratikulya is a state of the mind in which it has no interests and naturally knows nothing that is opposed to it. In this state of sublime resignation everything in the shape of attachment goes away completely, except that one all-absorbing love to Him in whom all things live and move and have their being. This attachment of love to God is indeed one that does not bind the soul but effectively breaks all its bondages.

Chapter VI
The Higher Knowledge and the Higher Love are One to the True Lover

The Upanishads distinguish between a higher knowledge and a lower knowledge; and to the Bhakta there is really no difference between this higher knowledge and his higher love (Parâ-Bhakti). The Mundaka Upanishad says:

व्दे विद्ये वेदितव्ये इति ह स्म यद्ब्रह्मविदो वदन्ति। परा चैवापरा च॥ तत्रापरा ऋग्वेदो यजुर्वदः सामवेदोऽथर्ववेदः शिक्षा कल्पो व्याकरणं निरुक्तं छन्दो ज्योतिषमिति। अथ परा यया तदक्षरमधिगम्यते॥

— "The knowers of the Brahman declare that there are two kinds of knowledge worthy to be known, namely, the Higher (Parâ) and the lower (Aparâ). Of these the lower (knowledge) consists of the Rig-Veda, the Yajur-Veda, the Sâma-Veda, the Atharva-Veda, the Shikshâ (or the science dealing with pronunciation and accent), the Kalpa (or the sacrificial liturgy), grammar, the Nirukta (or the science dealing with etymology and the meaning of words), prosody, and astronomy; and the higher (knowledge) is that by which that Unchangeable is known."

The higher knowledge is thus clearly shown to be the knowledge of the Brahman; and the *Devi-Bhâgavata* gives us the following definition of the higher love (Para-Bhakti): "As oil poured from one vessel to another falls in an unbroken line, so, when the mind in an unbroken stream thinks of the Lord, we have what is called Para-Bhakti or supreme love." This kind of undisturbed and ever-steady direction of the mind and the heart to the Lord with an inseparable attachment is indeed the highest manifestation of man's love to God. All other forms of Bhakti are only preparatory to the attainment of this highest form thereof, viz the Para-Bhakti which is also known as the love that comes after attachment (Râgânugâ). When this supreme love once comes into the heart of man, his mind will continuously think of God and remember nothing else. He will give no room in himself to thoughts other than those of God, and his soul will be unconquerably pure and will alone break all the bonds of mind and matter and become serenely free. He alone can worship the Lord in his own heart; to him forms, symbols, books, and doctrines are all unnecessary and are incapable of proving serviceable in any way. It is not easy to love the Lord thus. Ordinarily human love is seen to flourish only in places where it is returned; where love is not returned for love, cold indifference is the natural result. There are, however, rare instances in which we may notice love exhibiting itself even where there is no return of love. We may compare this kind of love, far purposes of illustration, to the love of the moth for the fire; the insect loves the fire, falls into it, and dies. It is indeed in the nature of this insect to love so. To love because it is the nature of love to love is undeniably the highest and the most unselfish manifestation of love that may be seen in the world. Such love, working itself out on the plane of spirituality, necessarily leads to the attainment of Para-Bhakti.

Chapter VII
The Triangle of Love

We may represent love as a triangle, each of the angles of which corresponds to one of its inseparable characteristics. There can be no triangle without all its three angles; and there can be no true love without its three following characteristics. The first angle of our triangle of love is that love knows no bargaining. Wherever there is any seeking for something in return, there can, be no real love; it becomes a mere matter of shop-keeping. As long as there is in us any idea of deriving this or that favour from God in return for our respect and allegiance to Him, so long there can be no true love growing in our hearts. Those who worship God because they wish Him to bestow favours on them are sure not to worship Him if those favours are not forthcoming. The Bhakta loves the Lord because He is lovable, there is no other motive originating or directing this divine emotion of the true devotee.

We have heard it said that a great king once went into a forest and there met a sage. He talked with the sage a little and was very much pleased with his purity and wisdom. The king then wanted the sage to oblige him by receiving a present from him. The sage refused to do so, saying, "The fruits of the forest are enough food for me; the pure streams of water flowing down from the mountains give enough drink for me; the barks of the trees supply me with enough covering; and the caves of the mountains form my home. Why should I take any present from you or from anybody?" The king said, "Just to benefit me, sir, please take something from my hands and please come with me to the city and to my palace." After much persuasion, the sage at last consented to do as the king desired and went with him to his palace. Before offering the gift to the sage, the king repeated his prayers, saying, "Lord, give me more children; Lord, give me more wealth; Lord, give me more territory; Lord, keep my body in better health", and so on. Before the king finished saying his prayer, the sage had got up and walked away from the room quietly. At this the king became perplexed and began to follow him, crying aloud, "Sir, you are going away, you have not received my gifts." The sage turned round to him and said, "I do not beg of beggars. You are yourself nothing but a beggar, and how can you give me anything? I am no fool to think of taking anything from a beggar like you. Go away, do not follow me."

There is well brought out the distinction between mere beggars and the real lovers of God. Begging is not the language of love. To worship God even for the sake of salvation or any other rewards equally degenerate. Love knows no reward. Love is always for love's sake. The Bhakta loves because he cannot help loving. When you see a beautiful scenery and fall in love with it, you do not demand anything in the way of favour from the scenery, nor does the scenery demand anything from you. Yet the vision thereof brings you to a blissful state of the mind; it tones down all the friction in your soul, it makes you calm, almost raises you, for the time being, beyond your mortal nature and places you in a condition of quite divine ecstasy. This nature of real love is the first angle of our triangle. Ask not anything in return for your love; let your position be always that of the giver; give your love unto God, but do not ask anything in return even from

Him.

The second angle of the triangle of love is that love knows no fear. Those that love God through fear are the lowest of human beings, quite undeveloped as men. They worship God from fear of punishment. He is a great Being to them, with a whip in one hand and the sceptre in the other; if they do not obey Him, they are afraid they will be whipped. It is a degradation to worship God through fear of punishment; such worship is, if worship at all, the crudest form of the worship of love. So long as there is any fear in the heart, how can there be love also? Love conquers naturally all fear. Think of a young mother in the street and a dog barking at her; she is frightened and flies into nearest house. But suppose the next day she is in the street with her child, and a lion springs upon the child. Where will be her position now? Of course, in the very mouth of the lion, protecting her child. Love conquers all fear. Fear comes from the selfish idea of cutting one's self off from the universe. The smaller and the more selfish I make myself, the more is my fear. If a man thinks he is a little nothing, fear will surely come upon him. And the less you think of yourself as an insignificant person, the less fear there will be for you. So long as there is the least spark of fear in you there can be no love there. Love and fear are incompatible; God is never to be feared by those who love Him. The commandment, "Do not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain", the true lover of God laughs at. How can there be any blasphemy in the religion of love? The more you take the name of the Lord, the better for you, in whatever way you may do it. You are only repeating His name because you love Him.

The third angle of the love-triangle is that love knows no rival, for in it is always embodied the lover's highest ideal. True love never comes until the object of our love becomes to us our highest ideal. It may be that in many cases human love is misdirected and misplaced, but to the person who loves, the thing he loves is always his own highest idea. One may see his ideal in the vilest of beings, and another in the highest of beings; nevertheless, in every case it is the ideal alone that can be truly and intensely loved. The highest ideal of every man is called God. Ignorant or wise, saint or sinner, man or woman, educated or uneducated, cultivated or uncultivated, to every human being the highest ideal is God. The synthesis of all the highest ideals of beauty, of sublimity, and of power gives us the completest conception of the loving and lovable God.

These ideals exist in some shape or other in every mind naturally; they form a part and parcel of all our minds. All the active manifestations of human nature are struggles of those ideals to become realised in practical life. All the various movements that we see around us in society are caused by the various ideals in various souls trying to come out and become concretised; what is inside presses on to come outside. This perennially dominant influence of the ideal is the one force, the one motive power, that may be seen to be constantly working in the midst of mankind. It may be after hundreds of births, after struggling through thousands of years, that man finds that it is vain to try to make the inner ideal mould completely the external conditions and square well with them; after realising this he no more tries to project his own ideal on the outside world, but worships the ideal itself as ideal from the highest standpoint of love. This ideally perfect

ideal embraces all lower ideals. Every one admits the truth of the saying that a lover sees Helen's beauty on an Ethiop's brow. The man who is standing aside as a looker-on sees that love is here misplaced, but the lover sees his Helen all the same and does not see the Ethiop at all. Helen or Ethiop, the objects of our love are really the centres round which our ideals become crystallised. What is it that the world commonly worships? Not certainly this all-embracing, ideally perfect ideal of the supreme devotee and lover. That ideal which men and women commonly worship is what is in themselves; every person projects his or her own ideal on the outside world and kneels before it. That is why we find that men who are cruel and blood-thirsty conceive of a bloodthirsty God, because they can only love their own highest ideal. That is why good men have a very high ideal of God, and their ideal is indeed so very different from that of others.

Chapter VIII
The God of Love is His Own Proof

What is the ideal of the lover who has quite passed beyond the idea of selfishness, of bartering and bargaining, and who knows no fear? Even to the great God such a man will say, "I will give You my all, and I do not want anything from You; indeed there is nothing that I can call my own." When a man has acquired this conviction, his ideal becomes one of perfect love, one of perfect fearlessness of love. The highest ideal of such a person has no narrowness of particularity about it; it is love universal, love without limits and bonds, love itself, absolute love. This grand ideal of the religion of love is worshipped and loved absolutely as such without the aid of any symbols or suggestions. This is the highest form of Para-Bhakti — the worship of such an all-comprehending ideal as the ideal; all the other forms of Bhakti are only stages on the way to reach it.

All our failures and all our successes in following the religion of love are on the road to the realisation of that one ideal. Object after object is taken up, and the inner ideal is successively projected on them all; and all such external objects are found inadequate as exponents of the ever-expanding inner ideal and are naturally rejected one after another. At last the aspirant begins to think that it is vain to try to realise the ideal in external objects, that all external objects are as nothing when compared with the ideal itself; and, in course of time, he acquires the power of realising the highest and the most generalised abstract ideal entirely as an abstraction that is to him quite alive and real. When the devotee has reached this point, he is no more impelled to ask whether God can be demonstrated or not, whether He is omnipotent and omniscient or not. To him He is only the God of Love; He is the highest ideal of love, and that is sufficient for all his purposes. He, as love, is self-evident. It requires no proofs to demonstrate the existence of the beloved to the lover. The magistrate-Gods of other forms of religion may require a good deal of proof prove Them, but the Bhakta does not and cannot think of such Gods at all. To him God exists entirely as love. "None, O beloved, loves the husband for the husband's sake, but it is for the sake of the Self who is in the husband that the husband is loved; none, O beloved, loves the wife for the wife's sake, but it is for the sake of the Self who is in the wife that the wife is loved."

It is said by some that selfishness is the only motive power in regard to all human activities. That also is love lowered by being particularised. When I think of myself as comprehending the Universal, there can surely be no selfishness in me; but when I, by mistake, think that I am a little something, my love becomes particularized and narrowed. The mistake consists in making the sphere of love narrow and contracted. All things in the universe are of divine origin and deserve to be loved; it has, however, to be borne in mind that the love of the whole includes the love of the parts. This whole is the God of the Bhaktas, and all the other Gods, Fathers in Heaven, or Rulers, or Creators, and all theories and doctrines and books have no purpose and no meaning for them, seeing that they have through their supreme love and devotion risen above those things altogether. When the heart is purified and cleansed and filled to the brim with the

divine nectar of love, all other ideas of God become simply puerile and are rejected as being inadequate or unworthy. Such is indeed the power of Para-Bhakti or Supreme Love; and the perfected Bhakta no more goes to see God in temples and churches; he knows no place where he will not find Him. He finds Him in the temple as well as out of the temple, he finds Him in the saint's saintliness as well as in the wicked man's wickedness, because he has Him already seated in glory in his own heart as the one Almighty inextinguishable Light of Love which is ever shining and eternally present.

Chapter IX
Human Representations of the Divine Ideal of Love

It is impossible to express the nature of this supreme and absolute ideal of love in human language. Even the highest flight of human imagination is incapable of comprehending it in all its infinite perfection and beauty. Nevertheless, the followers of the religion of love, in its higher as well as its lower forms, in all countries, have all along had to use the inadequate human language to comprehend and to define their own ideal of love. Nay more, human love itself, in all its varied forms has been made to typify this inexpressible divine love. Man can think of divine things only in his own human way, to us the Absolute can be expressed only in our relative language. The whole universe is to us a writing of the Infinite in the language of the finite. Therefore Bhaktas make use of all the common terms associated with the common love of humanity in relation to God and His worship through love.

Some of the great writers on Para-Bhakti have tried to understand and experience this divine love in so many different ways. The lowest form in which this love is apprehended is what they call the peaceful — the Shânta. When a man worships God without the fire of love in him, without its madness in his brain, when his love is just the calm commonplace love, a little higher than mere forms and ceremonies and symbols, but not at all characterized by the madness of intensely active love, it is said to be Shanta. We see some people in the world who like to move on slowly, and others who come and go like the whirlwind. The Shânta-Bhakta is calm, peaceful, gentle.

The next higher type is that of Dâsya, i.e. servantship; it comes when a man thinks he is the servant of the Lord. The attachment of the faithful servant unto the master is his ideal.

The next type of love is Sakhya, friendship — "Thou art our beloved friend." Just as a man opens his heart to his friend and knows that the friend will never chide him for his faults but will always try to help him, just as there is the idea of equality between him and his friend, so equal love flows in and out between the worshipper and his friendly God. Thus God becomes our friend, the friend who is near, the friend to whom we may freely tell all the tales of our lives. The innermost secrets of our hearts we may place before Him with the great assurance of safety and support. He is the friend whom the devotee accepts as an equal. God is viewed here as our playmate. We may well say that we are all playing in this universe. Just as children play their games, just as the most glorious kings and emperors play their own games, so is the Beloved Lord Himself in sport with this universe. He is perfect; He does not want anything. Why should He create? Activity is always with us for the fulfilment of a certain want, and want always presupposes imperfection. God is perfect; He has no wants. Why should He go on with this work of an ever-active creation? What purpose has He in view? The stories about God creating this world for some end or other that we imagine are good as stories, but not otherwise. It is all really in sport; the universe is His play going on. The whole universe must after all be a big piece of pleasing fun to Him. If you are poor, enjoy that as fun; if you are rich, enjoy the fun of being

rich; if dangers come, it is also good fun; if happiness comes, there is more good fun. The world is just a playground, and we are here having good fun, having a game; and God is with us playing all the while, and we are with Him playing. God is our eternal playmate. How beautifully He is playing! The play is finished when the cycle: comes to an end. There is rest for a shorter or longer time; again all come out and play. It is only when you forget that it is all play and that you are also helping in the play, it is only then that misery and sorrows come. Then the heart becomes heavy, then the world weighs upon you with tremendous power. But as soon as you give up the serious idea of reality as the characteristic of the changing incidents of the three minutes of life and know it to be but a stage on which we are playing, helping Him to play, at once misery ceases for you. He plays in every atom; He is playing when He is building up earths, and suns, and moons; He is playing with the human heart, with animals, with plants. We are His chessmen; He puts the chessmen on the board and shakes them up. He arranges us first in one way and then in another, and we are consciously or unconsciously helping in His play. And, oh, bliss! we are His playmates!

The next is what is known as Vâtsalya, loving God not as our Father but as our Child. This may look peculiar, but it is a discipline to enable us to detach all ideas of power from the concept of God. The idea of power brings with it awe. There should be no awe in love. The ideas of reverence and obedience are necessary for the formation of character; but when character is formed, when the lover has tasted the calm, peaceful love and tasted also a little of its intense madness, then he need talk no more of ethics and discipline. To conceive God as mighty, majestic, and glorious, as the Lord of the universe, or as the God of gods, the lover says he does not care. It is to avoid this association with God of the fear-creating sense of power that he worships God as his own child. The mother and the father are not moved by awe in relation to the child; they cannot have any reverence for the child. They cannot think of asking any favour from the child. The child's position is always that of the receiver, and out of love for the child the parents will give up their bodies a hundred times over. A thousand lives they will sacrifice for that one child of theirs, and, therefore, God is loved as a child. This idea of loving God as a child comes into existence and grows naturally among those religious sects which believe in the incarnation of God. For the Mohammedans it is impossible to have this idea of God as a child; they will shrink from it with a kind of horror. But the Christian and the Hindu can realise it easily, because they have the baby Jesus and the baby Krishna. The women in India often look upon themselves as Krishna's mother; Christian mothers also may take up the idea that they are Christ's mothers, and it will bring to the West the knowledge of God's Divine Motherhood which they so much need. The superstitions of awe and reverence in relation to God are deeply rooted in the bears of our hearts, and it takes long years to sink entirely in love our ideas of reverence and veneration, of awe and majesty and glory with regard to God.

There is one more human representation of the divine ideal of love. It is known as Madhura, sweet, and is the highest of all such representations. It is indeed based on the highest manifestation of love in this world, and this love is also the strongest known to man. What love shakes the whole nature of man, what love runs through every atom of his being — makes him mad, makes him forget his own nature, transforms him, makes him either a God or a demon —

as the love between man and woman. In this sweet representation of divine love God is our husband. We are all women; there are no men in this world; there is but One man, and this is He, our Beloved. All that love which man gives to woman, or woman to man, has her to be given up to the Lord.

All the different kinds of love which we see in the world, and with which we are more or less playing merely, have God as the one goal; but unfortunately, man does not know the infinite ocean into which this mighty river of love is constantly flowing, and so, foolishly, he often tries to direct it to little dolls of human beings. The tremendous love for the child that is in human nature is not for the little doll of a child; if you bestow it blindly and exclusively on the child, you will suffer in consequence. But through such suffering will come the awakening by which you are sure to find out that the love which is in you, if it is given to any human being, will sooner or later bring pain and sorrow as the result. Our love must, therefore, be given to the Highest One who never dies and never changes, to Him in the ocean of whose love there is neither ebb nor flow. Love must get to its right destination, it must go unto Him who is really the infinite ocean of love. All rivers flow into the ocean. Even the drop of water coming down from the mountain side cannot stop its course after reaching a brook or a river, however big it may be; at last even that drop somehow does find its way to the ocean. God is the one goal of all our passions and emotions. If you want to be angry, be angry with Him. Chide your Beloved, chide your Friend. Whom else can you safely chide? Mortal man will not patiently put up with your anger; there will be a reaction. If you are angry with me I am sure quickly to react, because I cannot patiently put up with your anger. Say unto the Beloved, "Why do You not come to me; why do You leave me thus alone?" Where is there any enjoyment but in Him? What enjoyment can there be in little clods of earth? It is the crystallised essence of infinite enjoyment that we have to seek, and that is in God. Let all our passions and emotions go up unto Him They are meant for Him, for if they miss their mark and go lower, they become vile; and when they go straight to the mark, to the Lord, even the lowest of them becomes transfigured. All the energies of the human body and mind, howsoever they may express themselves, have the Lord as their one goal, as their Ekâyana. All loves and all passions of the human heart must go to God. He is the Beloved. Whom else can this heart love? He is the most beautiful, the most sublime, He is beauty itself, sublimity itself. Who in this universe is more beautiful than He? Who in this universe is more fit to become the husband than He? Who in this universe is fitter to be loved than He? So let Him be the husband, let Him be the Beloved.

Often it so happens that divine lovers who sing of this divine love accept the language of human love in all its aspects as adequate to describe it. Fools do not understand this; they never will. They look at it only with the physical eye. They do not understand the mad throes of this spiritual love. How can they? "For one kiss of Thy lips, O Beloved! One who has been kissed by Thee, has his thirst for Thee increasing for ever, all his sorrows vanish, and he forgets all things except Thee alone." Aspire after that kiss of the Beloved, that touch of His lips which makes the Bhakta mad, which makes of man a god. To him, who has been blessed with such a kiss, the whole of nature changes, worlds vanish, suns and moons die out, and the universe itself melts

away into that one infinite ocean of love. That is the perfection of the madness of love.

Ay, the true spiritual lover does not rest even there; even the love of husband and wife is not mad enough for him. The Bhaktas take up also the idea of illegitimate love, because it is so strong; the impropriety of it is not at all the thing they have in view. The nature if this love is such that the more obstructions there are for its free play, the more passionate it becomes. The love between husband and wife is smooth, there are no obstructions there. So the Bhaktas take up the idea of a girl who is in love with her own beloved, and her mother or father or husband objects to such love; and the more anybody obstructs the course of her love, so much the more is her love tending to grow in strength. Human language cannot describe how Krishna in the groves of Vrindâ was madly loved, how at the sound of his voice the ever-blessed Gopis rushed out to meet him, forgetting everything, forgetting this world and its ties, its duties, its joys, and its sorrows. Man, O man, you speak of divine love and at the same time are able to attend to all the vanities of this world — are you sincere? "Where Râma is, there is no room for any desire — where desire is, there is no room for Rama; these never coexist — like light and darkness they are never together."

Chapter X
Conclusion

When this highest ideal of love is reached, philosophy is thrown away; who will then care for it? Freedom, Salvation, Nirvâna — all are thrown away; who cares to become free while in the enjoyment of divine love? "Lord, I do not want wealth, nor friends, nor beauty, nor learning, nor even freedom; let me be born again and again, and be Thou ever my Love. Be Thou ever and ever my Love." "Who cares to become sugar?" says the Bhakta, "I want to taste sugar." Who will then desire to become free and one with God? "I may know that I am He; yet will I take myself away from Him and become different, so that I may enjoy the Beloved." That is what the Bhakta says. Love for love's sake is his highest enjoyment. Who will not be bound hand and foot a thousand times over to enjoy the Beloved? No Bhakta cares for anything except love, except to love and to be loved. His unworldly love is like the tide rushing up the river; this lover goes up the river against the current. The world calls him mad I know one whom the world used to call mad, and this was his answer: "My friends, the whole world is a lunatic asylum. Some are mad after worldly love, some after name, some after fame, some after money, some after salvation and going to heaven. In this big lunatic asylum I am also mad, I am mad after God. If you are mad after money, I am mad after God. You are mad; so am I. I think my madness is after all the best." The true Bhakta's love is this burning madness before which everything else vanishes for him. The whole universe is to him full of love and love alone; that is how it seems to the lover. So when a man has this love in him, he becomes eternally blessed, eternally happy. This blessed madness of divine love alone can cure for ever the disease of the world that is in us. With desire, selfishness has vanished. He has drawn near to God, he has thrown off all those vain desires of which he was full before.

We all have to begin as dualists in the religion of love. God is to us a separate Being, and we feel ourselves to be separate beings also. Love then comes in the middle, and man begins to approach God, and God also comes nearer and nearer to man. Man takes up all the various relationships of life, as father, as mother, as son, as friend, as master, as lover, and projects them on his ideal of love, on his God. To him God exists as all these, and the last point of his progress is reached when he feels that he has become absolutely merged in the object of his worship. We all begin with love for ourselves, and the unfair claims of the little self make even love selfish. At last, however, comes the full blaze of light, in which this little self is seen to have become one with the Infinite. Man himself is transfigured in the presence of this Light of Love, and he realises at last the beautiful and inspiring truth that Love, the Lover, and the Beloved are One.